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ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Letter dated 9 April 1999 from the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Armenia to the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed to the Chairperson of the Commission on Human Rights

By addressing this letter to you, my delegation would like to draw your attention to the ongoing propaganda campaigns of the Government of Azerbaijan at this session of the Commission, another example of which is contained in document E/CN.4/1999/115, submitted by the Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan. As previous such letters, this document reflects a series of distorted facts in relation to the so-called Armenian armed aggression towards Azerbaijan.

It is interesting to note that this time the Azeri propaganda machinery focuses on false information on damage done to its cultural heritage by referring to a hypothetical visit of a UNESCO mission to "the areas of Azerbaijan occupied by Armenia's armed forces". Thus, led by a sick imagination, Azerbaijan draws this highly respectable institution of the United Nations into its trap of lies and calumnies.

Speaking about the preservation of historical and cultural values and their destruction in the region, my delegation would like to mention that in December 1998 the Government of Armenia sent a letter to UNESCO requiring a fact-finding mission be sent to the Autonomous Republic of Nakhitchevan in order to report on the extent of systematic destruction of the medieval Armenian cemetery in the town of Djulfa, subjected to acts of vandalism by the Azerbaijan authorities. Direct eye-witnesses confirmed that tombstones were being removed using mobile cranes loaded on flat-bed carriages and the ground

underneath flattened. Similar information has been disclosed by news agencies including the BBC, Reuters, Itar-Tass and AP, substantiated by the statements of some of the diplomatic missions and embassies accredited in Yerevan, as well as the complaints addressed to the local authorities by foreign observers in Nakhitchevan.

This particular museum-cemetery of Djulfa contains valuable Khatchkars (stone-crosses) dating from the ninth to the sixteenth century and sculpted tombstones revered by Armenians for their spiritual value and as sacred relics of Armenian sculptural art. These Khatchkars, famous for their exceptional beauty, are a tribute to the world's artistic and cultural heritage, to be preserved regardless of the national or religious symbols they portray.

Furthermore, their destruction at the time and in a territory where there is no war or conflict can only be qualified as intentional acts of vandalism planned by the local authorities, who continue to display a profound contempt towards human values and heritage.

In the light of the above, it is clear that the Azerbaijani authorities have once more attempted to mislead the international community with their brutal policies, this time directed towards the art forms and cultural values of Armenians.

I would be grateful if you could circulate this letter as an official document of the fifty-fifth session of the Commission on Human Rights, under agenda item 10.

(Signed): Karen NAZARIAN

Ambassador
Permanent Representative